

YOU demand:

- Army of readers and experts back campaign
- Minister pledges £1m but we say: it's not enough

By Michael Powell
and Brendan Carlin

THE Government last night ordered local councils to stop selling off parks and green spaces as an army of readers, experts and celebrities backed The Mail on Sunday's Save Our Parks campaign.

Communities Secretary James Brokenshire hailed the campaign and announced £1million would be spent on establishing new 'pocket parks' in urban areas.

But he stopped short of meeting our demands and also angered council chiefs by appearing to pin the blame on them.

The row came as:

- Our campaign secured its first victory by forcing councillors to reconsider plans to build on a park in the Devon village of Westward Ho!
- Hundreds of readers inundated The Mail on Sunday with letters and emails detailing the threat to parks in their area;
- Celebrities led by Alan Titchmarsh, Julia Bradbury and Dame Joan Collins rallied behind the crusade.

Responding to the crisis, Mr Brokenshire said the Government was 'giving councils over £200million until 2020 and the freedom to spend this on meeting local priorities. That includes the vital work of maintaining local parks'.

He urged local authorities 'to act in the best interests of their local community', adding: 'Of course we recognise the financial pressures facing councils and we understand they have been making, and continue to make, extremely tough choices.'

'I would hope and expect them to address those issues of most concern to the public. Local authorities must not use the need to manage their finances prudently as an excuse to sell off green spaces.'

Furious councils hit back last night. Gerald Vernon-Jackson, chairman of the Local Government Association's culture, tourism and sport board, said: 'Councils want to do everything they can to keep their parks and green spaces open and available to communities.'

'Facing a funding gap of nearly £8billion by 2025, councils need the Government to urgently address the future sustainability of local services before they are reduced further or stopped altogether.'

And Allison Ogden-Newton, chief executive of the charity Keep Britain Tidy, warned that the £1million 'pocket parks' plan was insufficient. 'What is needed is significant and sustained investment,' she said.

Writing in today's Mail on Sunday, TV gardener Alan Titchmarsh said 'destroying our parks is not just short-sighted, it is plain wrong'.

Good Morning Britain host Susanna Reid demanded that officials stop concreting over green spaces, and Julia Bradbury, presenter of ITV's Britain's Best Walks, said: 'If we lose our parks, it will take decades or even centuries to reclaim them and all the benefits that they offer society.'

Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson, the former Paralympics star who is now chairman



GILLY RALLIES THE EXPERTS

OUR campaign dominated a conference of parks and gardens experts last week in Malvern, Worcestershire, where Gilly Drummond, above, vice life president of the Gardens Trust, held our front page aloft and warned: 'Precious green places are under very serious threat.'

of health body UKActive, backed our campaign, saying: 'The attack on our open spaces poses a major threat to the health of future generations.'

'And the deterioration of our parks that The Mail on Sunday's campaign highlights is a national disgrace.'

Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield said saving parks could help to combat Britain's obesity crisis.

She said: 'The Mail on Sunday is right that more needs to be done to save our parks from redevelopment or disrepair. We need to do all we can to get more young people outside playing and being active.'

A recent report by UKActive found that just a quarter of boys and fifth of girls complete the recommended 60 minutes of activity each day. Experts believe that the health benefits from parks saves the NHS £111million a year, while the charity Fields In Trust says parks provide £34billion in health and social benefits.

Readers across the country fighting to save their local parks and green spaces said our campaign had given them renewed hope and a voice. They include users of Wandale Park in Croydon, South London, who fear it will become a 'no go' area after the council axed its park keeper.

In Liverpool, tens of thousands of campaigners are fighting plans to build luxury properties on the 94-acre Calderstones Park. And in Deptford, South-East London, protesters have pledged to sit in front of bulldozers at Old Tidemill park, where developers want to build more than 200 homes.

Additional reporting by Valerie Elliott

OUR FIRST VICTORY: A RE



MoS hailed as council backs down over housing scheme

CAMPAIGNERS waved copies of The Mail on Sunday in triumph last week as a council was forced to back down over plans for a new housing scheme in the Devon village of Westward Ho!

During a passionate meeting of Torridge District Council within hours of the launch of the Save Our Parks campaign, councillors voted to reconsider plans to sell off almost half of the much-loved park to developers hoping to

build just ten houses there. A succession of speakers pleaded with councillors to scrap the plan. More than 60 residents squeezed into the town hall, forcing officials to lock the doors to avoid a crush.

Phil Hodson, who takes his grandchildren to play

Council agreed
10
new houses
on the park

in the park, asked: 'Has a case been made that the only route to regenerate the park is by selling 40 or 50 per cent of it for housing development? The answer has to be no.'

Councillor Nick Laws, who had organised a 4,000-name petition against the plans, said: 'The battle isn't won yet but your story has brought a sea change in the approach of this authority.'

Councillors voted 24-2 to reconsider the plan.

...but voted
24-2
to reconsider
after our story

SOUTHCHURCH HALL GARDENS, ESS



DEFIANT: Patricia Sampson, right, with some of her fellow unpaid volunteers in Southend

Save our Parks

PRIEVE FOR WESTWARD HO!



CLEAR MESSAGE: Young park fan Beth with the placard she took to the council meeting

Concerned celebrities add their voice to yours

'Well done to The Mail on Sunday. Parks and open spaces are important for everyone and they must stay open and be cared for.'

BBC One Show presenter Alex Jones

'We cannot allow our parks to fall into disrepair. We must save them from the concrete and building.'

Good Morning Britain star Susanna Reid

'Parks are not just pretty green spaces to look at. They are integral to community life in towns and cities across the country.'

TV presenter and keen walker Julia Bradbury, right

'Green spaces have known and proven benefits for people's health and wellbeing'

Broadcaster and author Kate Humble

'Parks are vital. They are the lungs of the city and a place where children can play and get some fresh air. Parks make us feel happier.'

ITV presenter Lorraine Kelly



'At a time when obesity is becoming an epidemic, and youngsters are being sucked ever deeper into an addictive world of gaming and social media, it's never been more important for us to have public parks and green spaces.'

Broadcaster Simon Reeve

'I've never joined a gym because I think a brisk walk in the fresh air each day is just as beneficial - and it's free.'

TV presenter Carol Smillie

'Growing up in the middle of a city, it's hugely important for kids to have somewhere green to play, both for physical and psychological wellbeing.'

Strictly Come Dancing 2017 winner Joe McFadden



Joan Collins
@JoanCollinsDoe · Sep 30

Whatever your political persuasion our parks are (and have for some time been) in jeopardy. I urge you to choose a campaign and help save our green and pleasant land!



SUPPORT: Joan Collins's tweet about parks

Parks Poem by MoS reader Mike Lewis

Ebenezer Howard* through his Garden City vision,
Recognised the benefits of open space provision,
In leafy parks and playing fields, in football boots and shorts,
Kids learnt to be competitive through exercise and sports.
'Fitness, health, and hygiene,' was the order of the day,
But Ebenezer's worthy aims have long been thrown away.

By selling off the civic parks belonging to the nation,
And building on the playing fields once meant for recreation,
Erecting terraced housing that's completely unaffordable,
Packed so tight there's not the slightest chance to kick around a ball,
We're dooming generations to unhealthy lives of stress -
Ironically, the very problem civic parks addressed!

*Urban planner Sir Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) founder of the garden-city movement, which put green spaces at the heart of towns.

LETTERS SPECIAL Pages 102, 103

'The thin grey line' clearing out criminals

A 'THIN grey line' of pensioners is struggling to prise their historic park from the grip of pimps, prostitutes and drug users after the council axed its keeper three years ago.

Volunteers stepped in to patrol Southchurch Hall Gardens in Southend, Essex, after the area became strewn with used condoms, needles and even discarded flick knives.

They were forced to act following a £2.6million cut in the parks budget by Southend Council. Over the past three years, instances of anti-social behaviour has risen by 64 per cent.

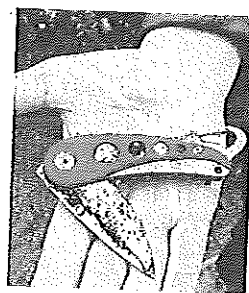
Patricia Sampson, 73, who formed the Southchurch Hall

Inspirational Parkers in a bid to drive out the criminals, said: 'On our litter-picking events, we find such things like used condoms, used needles, drug bags and knives - not the kind of environment that you want to visit, particularly with children.'

Her defiance has not been without cost. Last month, Mrs Sampson was attacked by a

Parks budget cut by
£2.6m
since 2015

...anti-social behaviour rose
64%
after 2015

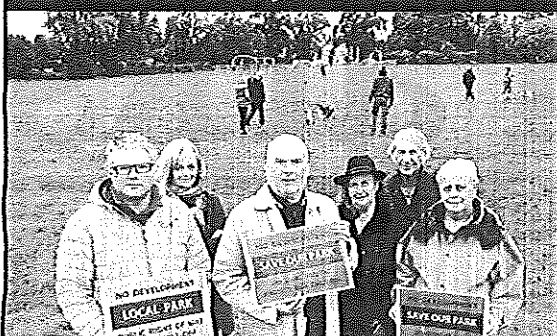


DANGER: A flick knife found at Southchurch Hall Gardens

thug who hit her in the face with a dustbin. A man has been charged.

'I am now even more determined that this iconic park should be protected from anti-social behaviour,' she said.

GREENFIELDS, SHREWSBURY



LEGAL FIGHT: Peter Day, centre, with supporters. Below: The sold sign

'Officials just want to make a quick buck'

PEOPLE in Shrewsbury are battling plans to build 15 new homes on parkland.

Around a third of the Greenfields recreation ground, which is popular with local families, has been sold for £500,000 to a developer. Now local campaigners are trying to raise money to force a judicial review.

Dr Peter Day, an arts and design lecturer at the University of Wolverhampton, said: 'This land was left by the forefathers of Shrewsbury in 1925 for the community to enjoy but it has been sold.'

'We are trying to put up a fight but it comes down to resources.'

'We've raised around £3,000 for legal advice already but I think the council will keep going until we run out of energy or run out of money.'

A new road will be laid in the park alongside a footpath currently used by 300 children going to and from a nearby primary school on weekdays.

Dr Day said: 'We are totally against what is happening. This is a lovely green area that is well-used by families.'

'We host a fete on the park each year, the kids play football down here and there is a basket-



ball court. But these days it feels like councils just view green space like the Klondike gold rush.

'Wherever they can find a bit of green space they will sell it off to make a quick buck.'

Helen Ball, clerk of Shrewsbury Town Council, said the sale was 'completely above board'.

Plan to build
15
homes on
parkland

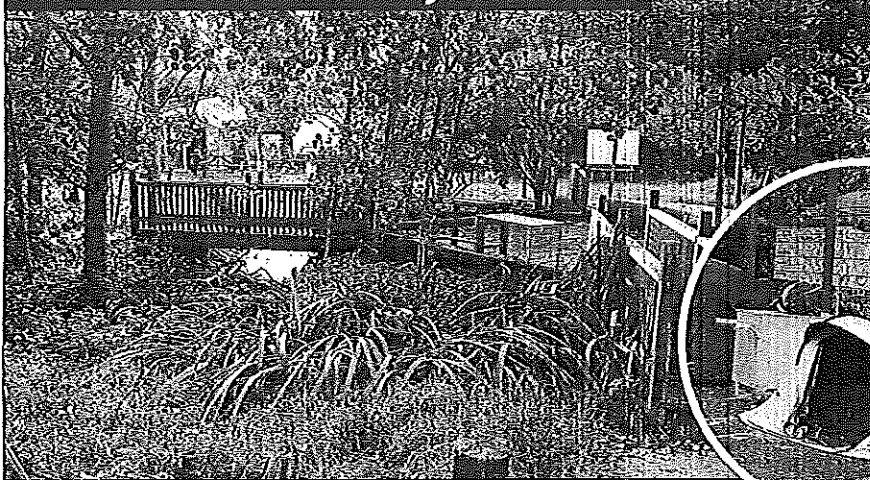
Locals raise
£3,000
for legal action
to stop sale

JESSEL



PLAY TIME: Schoolchildren at a park at Jessel Green. Above: Dog walkers enjoying its open spaces

OLD TIDEMILL PARK, LONDON



FACING THE BULLDOZER: The tranquil park in Deptford. Right: A campaigner's tent in the park

'We're going to chain ourselves to the trees'

CAMPAIGNERS have vowed to chain themselves to trees if town hall chiefs push ahead with plans to bulldoze their park in South-East London.

Protesters have been camped in Old Tidemill Park in Deptford since August 27 when officials tried to lock the site.

The half-acre garden is on the site of a planned 209-home development. Other critics are unhappy that only 47 per cent

of the homes will be classed as affordable.

A showdown beckons on October 24 after the council served an eviction notice. Luciana Duallibe, who helps maintain the garden with her daughter Talia Silva, said: 'I'm prepared to chain myself to the trees if they come.'

Lewisham Council said temporary permission had been given for people to keep using the park, adding: 'We're disappointed they are repaying our generosity by refusing to leave.'

Council plans
209
new homes
on the site

...and only
47%
is affordable
social housing

ALAN TITCHMARSH: WHEN MONEY'S TIGHT PARKS ARE LAST THINGS TO CUT PAGE 21

GREEN, ESSEX



Huge housing estate will concrete over local paradise for dog walkers

A PARK named in honour of a judge who kept a famous forest open to the public could be lost for ever if it is replaced by a housing estate.

Campaigners in Loughton, Essex, are battling to save Jessel Green and have gathered 5,000 signatures on a petition opposing plans to build 154 homes on the site.

Mother of three Amanda Payton said: 'This is such an important green space for our community.'

'It is surrounded by two secondary schools and three primary schools and it is well used

during the day by childminders and dog walkers.

'We understand there's a need for more local houses. But there are alternative sites available that we know the landowners are willing to sell. The council doesn't need to sacrifice this area.'

Council hopes
154
homes will be
built on land

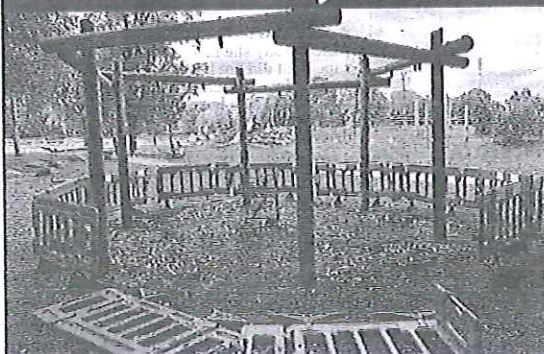
...but army of
5,000
have mustered
to fight plan

The green is named after Sir George Jessel, a judge who ruled in 1874 that nearby Epping Forest should 'never be enclosed' from public use. But Epping Forest District Council wants to sacrifice half the park that bears his name.

The judge's great-great-grandson has joined the campaign to save Jessel Green.

A council spokeswoman said it needs to build 11,400 homes across the area before 2033, adding: 'We are not a cash-strapped council but looking at a fair balance across our district.'

WANDLE PARK, CROYDON



OUT OF BOUNDS: Barriers around a piece of play equipment at the park

£3.4m playground that is now plagued by yobs

AN INNER-city park given £3.4million of public funding to restore it to its Victorian splendour has become a 'no-go' zone plagued by yobs and drug gangs.

Police, community groups and the council have discussed the spiralling drugs and violence at Wandle Park in Croydon, including a recent alleged rape.

But the council axed the on-site park keeper role last month, just as suspected gang activity was soaring.

Funding for improvements included £2million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, including cash to employ a full-time volunteering and learning officer at the site.

But the lottery cash has now gone – and so has the job.

Last week the park was littered with discarded 'hippy crack' canisters – small metal containers that contain 'legal highs' inhaled by users.

Teacher Layla Jones, 35, who visits the park with her daughters Seren, three, and five-month-old Zinny, has been horrified by some of the things she has seen. She said: 'One morning there were several used condoms right



HORRIFIED: Mum Layla Jones

by the children's play area. I've seen people smoking drugs and the vandalism speaks for itself.'

Croydon Council said it planned to install a mobile CCTV unit in the area and give police access to the park at night.

Council got
£2m
lottery grant
to upgrade park

...but now has
0
staff there to
look after it

CALDERSTONES PARK, LIVERPOOL

New homes will choke green lungs of the city

LABOUR Mayor Joe Anderson is embroiled in a toxic row with protesters against plans to build 51 luxury homes on one of Liverpool's best-loved spaces.

A petition opposing plans to develop Calderstones Park and the Harthill Estate has attracted a staggering 40,000 signatures and campaigners hope a High Court judicial review next month will kill off the proposal.

But Mr Anderson has accused campaigners of 'smears and lies' in a leaked internal letter to local Labour Party members.

If the development goes ahead, an accredited disabled riding centre and popular model railway



ROW: How the proposed new estate would cut a swathe through the park. Below: Calderstones Park lover William Heath, three, in his campaign T-shirt

line will have to relocate. Retired teacher Caroline Williams said: 'This is a valued and much-loved park and it would be a massive loss to the community if these houses are allowed to be built. This is one of the green lungs of our city.'

The Calderstones and Harthill estates, linked to two of the

world's greatest shipping lines, Cunard and the Bibby Line, were bought by the city council in the early 20th Century to create a cleaner, greener environment for Liverpudlians.

A spokesman for Liverpool Council declined to comment.

Historic park
could see
51
new homes

...but plans
are opposed by
40,000
campaigners

WHAT WE'RE DEMANDING

● A statutory requirement for councils to ring-fence funding for parks at £30 per household, per year.

● A legal duty for all green space to be managed to a good standard.

● New rules banning development on, or the inappropriate use of, parkland.

● A new central Government fund to provide emergency help



for the parks most at risk and ensure the long-term future of Britain's green spaces.

IS YOUR PARK UNDER THREAT? JOIN US AND TELL YOUR STORY

Email your story to: parks@mailonsunday.co.uk

or write to: Save Our Parks Campaign, Mail on Sunday, Northcliffe House, 2 Derry Street, London W8 5TT



B RITAIN'S public parks are the envy of the world. From the grandest metropolitan spaces to the modestly provincial, they are a magnificent tribute to earlier generations who recognised that everyone living in towns and cities should, regardless of their financial circumstances, have a patch of our green and pleasant land within walking distance of their homes.

Yet, after centuries at the heart of our lives – Hyde Park was opened to the public by Charles I in 1637 – parks and public gardens up and down the country are under serious threat.

As many as three quarters of councils are cutting back on maintenance, with further damaging savings to come.

Children's play areas are vanishing, lawns are untended and flowerbeds have been removed from hundreds of sites, all in the name of saving money. It is a reckless false economy, and one that will have disastrous results.

I have more reason than most to love the parks and open spaces that are our birthright.

My childhood was shaped by the Riverside Gardens that run along the banks of the Wharfe in Ilkley, a wonderful recreation ground, but with flower beds, too.

It was Ilkley's parks department that gave me my first job as an apprentice, a solid horticultural training and the first important step on the way to life as a professional gardener. Even back then I got huge satisfaction watching young and old alike, rich and poor, enjoy the fruits of our labours.

So I wholeheartedly back The Mail on Sunday's campaign to highlight the growing menace to the very existence of our public parks as we know them.

Parks and public gardens are the lungs of towns and cities, the breathing spaces we so desperately need both in summer and winter. But all too often they are taken for granted by those responsible for their funding.

P ARKS are seen as a luxury, an easy target in times of economic pressure, low-hanging fruit when it comes to money-saving cuts.

As a result, they are ceasing to be the delightful, life-enhancing pocket landscapes we once knew and are instead declining into overgrown wildernesses filled with litter and dog mess.

One in three parks no longer has staff on site. Once neglected, they become a magnet for drug users and those with darker motives. Mothers and fathers become fearful of visiting with their children. In short, a civic amenity becomes a frightening no-go area.

The sheer scale of the cutbacks is bewildering. Since 2016, more than 200 local authorities have cut their parks budgets.

Newcastle City Council has slashed its parks budget by 97 per cent and handed over their running

Our glorious parks shouldn't be the first thing sacrificed when money is tight – they should be the absolute last

By **ALAN TITCHMARSH**

to volunteers. Bristol Council made a similar move earlier this year. Sunderland has cut more than £750,000 in the past two years. Edinburgh has slashed £860,000.

Torquay has paved over flower beds. In Sidcup, Kent, the council is planning to build houses on Old Farm Park. And almost all councils expect to make further cuts within the next five years.

It is a dismal prospect. When campaigners say we are at a tipping point, they are right.

Of course there must be spending priorities, particularly in these difficult economic times.

We need a health service that is properly funded and one which is capable of dealing with an ageing population. We need schools that are well equipped, based on a sound collective ethos and staffed with qualified teachers. We want to live in cities, towns and villages where we can feel safe, where we can sleep soundly in our beds.

No one would argue with these three basic tenets. But to use them

as an excuse for destroying our parks is not just short-sighted, it is plain wrong. It does not take the mind of a Nobel Laureate to realise that gardens, parks and open spaces impinge directly on those 'big three' concerns of health, education and law and order. You don't have to be a genius to see that prevention is so much better than cure.

Fresh air, for example, is evidently good for our health, while life confined amid polluted towns and cities, where there is little opportunity to breathe clean air, demonstrably leads to sickness. A lack of open space saps our energy and opens the door to mental illness and depression.

The trees, shrubs and hedges in our parks and public gardens trap pollution and allow us to breathe more easily. Beds of flowers inspire joy. In short, a walk in the park will send you home with a spring in your step. Good air in your lungs gives you the impetus to battle on.

It is blindingly obvious that open spaces play an important part in

reducing pressure on the National Health Service. Our parks and gardens are not a drain on hard-pressed resources – they are saving the NHS millions.

Then there is education, which must surely include an understanding of the landscape in which we live and a feeling of responsibility for its future. Parks and gardens have a role to play here, too, allowing children to watch the passing of the seasons, to see birds, bees and butterflies and to observe the part they play in the overall health of the planet.

Conservation is not just about cutting down on the amount of plastic we use, it is also about knowing how plants and animals live together in the heart of our towns and cities.

Law and order is not just about having more police officers on the streets. It is also about preventing frustration, about an opportunity to let off steam.

While I cannot claim that public



FOND MEMORIES: Eight-year-old Alan with his mother Bessie in the Riverside Gardens in Ilkley in 1957

parks will prevent armed robberies, they certainly boost community spirit through allowing competitive sports and games, as well as jogging, walking and other forms of exercise.

One problem with those in authority – and with modern life – is that they like things that can be quantified and measured, boxes that can be ticked and quotas that can be achieved. Preventative work is hard to quantify, but is essential all the same.

It is for these and many other reasons that governments, both national and local, need to wake up to the all-too-obvious benefits of well-maintained parks and open spaces instead of regarding them as eminently expendable.

Far from being the first things that should be sacrificed in times of economic restraint, public parks and gardens should be the very last to go.

Such a cavalier attitude to our urban green spaces is a sure recipe for an impoverished future.

And it is a crying shame.

My childhood was shaped by the local recreation ground – and the park gave me my first steps to being a gardener

Letters special

Write to: The Letters Editor, The Mail on Sunday, Northcliffe House, 2 Derry Street, London W8 5TS. Fax: 020 7937 3829 Email: letters@mailonsunday.co.uk

Thank you MoS - we must save parks, not let them go to ruin

The Mail on Sunday's campaign to save our parks is to be applauded.

Perpetual cuts have led to many of our once beautiful parks being neglected or not maintained. Flowerbeds are now full of weeds, or have been concreted over. Gardeners have been laid off and the land sold. This is a warped logic. A beautiful park can lift spirits and not only enhance an area, but provide a haven for wildlife. Parks not only improve the environment, but they are very beneficial to our health and wellbeing. Britain is a beautiful country but our parks are in need of major investment for the benefit of all. They should be better maintained and protected, not left neglected. They are becoming eyesores and not what the Victorians designed them for.

Nick Fletcher,
Malton, North Yorkshire

This excellent and long overdue campaign will reach a very large number of people and hopefully a large number of local authorities.

Access to our parks, gardens and green spaces are essential to everyone in our villages, towns, cities and the suburbs. They are where children hang out, parents push prams, the elderly sit in the sun and everyone can enjoy a picnic.

Gilly Drummond, Vice Life President, The Gardens Trust

What a great campaign. I thought I was alone in my quest to get



something done regarding the downfall of our parks.

Angie Smith, Maidstone, Kent

The Mail on Sunday is so right to highlight this alarming lack of concern and deplorable decrease in park resources. Glasgow could once boast more parks than any other city in Europe. Not now.

John Cusack, via email

I salute The Mail on Sunday on its major campaign to halt the decline of our parks. It was shocking and sad to read how thousands of our spaces are falling by the wayside into disrepair or being sold off by cash-strapped councils. Our lovely, picturesque green spaces and parks since Victorian times have had a special place in the hearts of millions of people and given visitors many happy memories. All of us should throw our weight behind The Mail

on Sunday's vital campaign and do everything possible to Save Our Parks.

David Courtney,
Weston-Super-Mare

The Mail on Sunday has raised a very important issue. What is happening now should be viewed as a national scandal, especially as an apparent remedy seems to be available to local authorities. What has happened to the proceeds from the Community Infrastructure Levy, a planning charge introduced by the Planning Act 2008 to provide local authorities with an additional source of taxation income which could only be used to finance infrastructure projects?

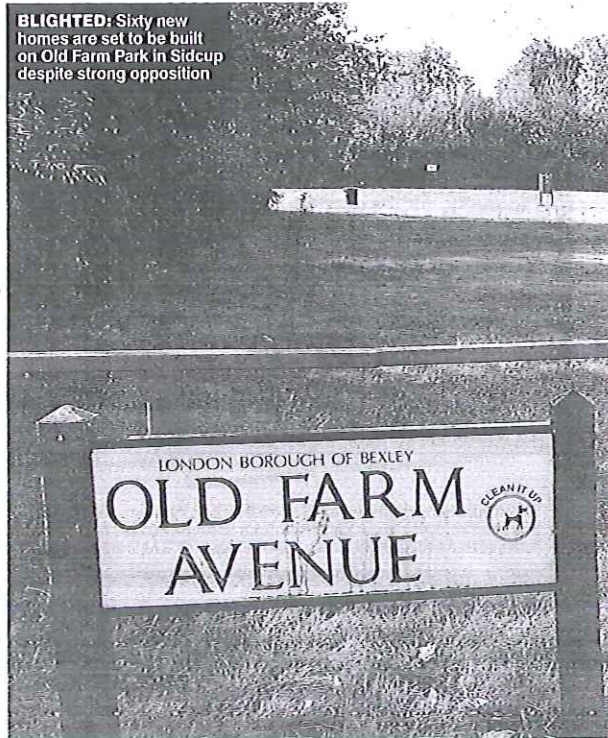
John Harding,
Budleigh Salterton, Devon

The politicians keep urging people to get off their backsides and use the parks to keep healthy and fit to ease the burden of the NHS treating people for obesity and other related conditions, yet they take from us the means to avoid these ailments.

Keith Martin, via email

I am astonished that as a nation we now struggle to maintain our public parks. I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s when we took parks and playgrounds for granted, along with public libraries, free milk and an effective healthcare system. Our population has increased by 20 per

BLIGHTED: Sixty new homes are set to be built on Old Farm Park in Sidcup despite strong opposition



LETTER OF THE WEEK

People have lost their

I am so pleased the parks in peril subject is being brought into the public domain.

I was a parks and nursery manager for Calderdale Council in Halifax and Kirklees Council in Huddersfield from 2004, and I was proud to provide a high level of service for both authorities, supplying bedding plants and floral displays.

But since 2014, budgets at both authorities were cut so severely that the Kirklees plant nursery was forced to close, putting skilled local people out of work. The move deprived residents of bright floral displays.

Savings in budgets also resulted in a steep decline in the quality of parks and the maintenance of green spaces - much to the disappointment of local residents.

Calderdale Council has suffered similarly, with grass cutting reduced from 12 to five times a year. Luckily this year grass has not grown much due to the unusually dry weather.

If it had been a normal season, the grass would have been waist high in many places.

More than 50 per cent of traditional flowerbeds have disappeared and bedding plant production is down by two-thirds

Lockerbie trial was a parody of justice

Thank you for publishing Douglas Boyd's analysis of the Lockerbie case last week.

I am the father of Flora Swire, who was murdered on the aircraft in 1988, and I attended the subsequent trial of Libyan Abdelbaset Al Megrahi.

By the end I was convinced that we had witnessed a parody of justice. There were many deficiencies in the evidence, and those of us who have sought the truth have been further frustrated by the Government and Scottish High Court.

It has become clear to us that the trial was designed not to convict those responsible, but to further the wishes of the US and UK governments.

We agree with Douglas Boyd that the available evidence points to an Iranian decision to get revenge for the shooting down of an Iranian plane with 290 souls aboard.

In our sad search we have also uncovered material showing that

Girls being put at risk

As a former Girl Guide, it saddened me to read your interview last week with Helen Watts, who was spied on then sacked for daring to speak out about Girlguiding's transgender policy. Two things made me very nervous: first, that Guide leaders cannot tell parents that a transgender girl, who was born a male, would be going to camp and sharing tents and toilets/showers with their

daughters. As a mother of three daughters and grandmother of two granddaughters, I find this appalling and a dereliction of duty of care by Girlguiding.

Secondly, the way Helen was treated is equally disturbing. I sincerely hope that my two granddaughters do not go into Girlguiding but choose to join other organisations instead.

Susan Rust,
Borough Green, Kent

the Government of the day had ample accurate warnings in advance of what was about to happen, but raised not a finger to prevent it happening.

Dr Jim Swire,
Gloucestershire

Basil breaks the rules

Event magazine's review last week of TV producer Jon Plowman's book *How To Produce*

Comedy Breaks quoted John Cleese (pictured right) and his three rules of comedy: no puns, no puns and no puns. Presumably Fawlty [faulty] Towers is the exception which proves the rule?

Vincent Hefter,
Richmond-upon-Thames

Burying the hatchet

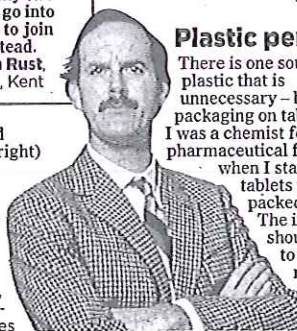
The Prime Minister is planning to recreate the Festival of Britain to celebrate Brexit. That's great. I can't wait to see the pleasure gardens back in Battersea Park in London - and perhaps the Tunnel of Love could be used for reconciliations by all the parties.

Philip Brannon,
London

Plastic peril

There is one source of plastic that is unnecessary - blister packaging on tablets. I was a chemist for a pharmaceutical firm and when I started, tablets were packed in bottles. The industry should return to this method.

J.A. Hoffman,
Liverpool



58 million reasons to cheer Liz

Liz Hurley and her son Damian (right) looked fabulous in your pictures last week, but what is even more impressive is that she has helped to raise more than £58 million to combat breast cancer. It can often be forgotten how celebrities use their public profile for good causes.

J. Benn, London

It was heartwarming to see your pictures of Liz and Damian and reading about how they get on like a house on fire. Damian now wants to enter the showbiz world, and I am sure he will make a big splash when he does.

David Francis, Bristol



cent since then but where has the money gone? Do we have too many 'wealth sappers' rather than 'wealth creators', shuffling money around rather than creating it, dreaming up laws, rules and regulations or new ways of becoming 'offended' and seeking redress? Skint? I despair!
Steve Milner, Guildford

What on earth is happening to our country when we have to give up our parks and playing fields? When they are sold off, they will be lost for ever.

M. Annable,
Alfreton, Derbyshire

I know the park under threat in Sidecup that you featured last week as my daughter lives there, and I believe the developers have a cheek by wanting to build on it. It has been a park for years. Why are these councils so money-strapped? Where are our monthly council tax payments going and when is the Government going to put a stop to it? Once our green and pleasant land has gone, it is gone and we will never get it back. It seems nobody is listening to protests. It all comes down to money and how much developers can make and how much councils and the people selling the land can get out of it, regardless of how those living there feel about it.

S. Kemp, New Ash Green, Kent

Thousands of parks are falling into disrepair or being sold off by cash-strapped councils. This coincides with news that the average life expectancy is set to fall in the UK, along with reports that 62 per cent of the population are now classed as overweight and that obesity is estimated to cost the NHS about £5 billion a year. Is there a correlation here?

Angus Long, Newcastle

Of course we must save our parks. It is disgusting to even think about building on our green spaces.

Christine Sillitoe, via email

Reading about all those parks under threat really saddened me. I cannot believe that council chiefs and politicians can waste millions each year on silly projects but leave misery for the many. Let's pray and hope someone speaks out for more parks to improve family lives.

Paul Cobley,
Hall Green, Birmingham



FIGHTING BACK: Protesters battling the sale of a park in Staffordshire

Parks were created to improve health and bring local communities together. Today's society has a greater need for health and wellbeing, both of which can be improved by green spaces. Rangers provide essential education to children and young people by helping them to improve the environment and change perceptions for the future. Society is changing for the worse and stress levels are increasing. Open spaces provide an escape from the mayhem.

Olivia Faulkand,
Newton-Le-Willows, Merseyside

Thank you for launching the Save Our Parks campaign, which addresses a crisis for many communities around the UK. We Love Stoke Lodge, a community group representing 900 local residents in Stoke Bishop, Bristol, is fighting to maintain open public access to a vital and historic green lung at the heart of our community.

Helen Powell and
Emma Burgess, via email

Thank you for starting your campaign to save Britain's parks because our green and pleasant land has never been so threatened. Croydon's Labour Council are failing on many fronts, one of which is the removal of the protected status of a very large

number of local parks. One of these parks sits next to my road. Higher Drive Recreation Ground in Purley is a wide open space which includes a well-appointed children's playground, a dilapidated football enclosure, and a tennis court in an even worse state. However, the park is enjoyed by locals, especially dog walkers, which includes my wife and myself, and several of my neighbours.

Brian Watson, Purley, Surrey

Thank you to the Mail on Sunday for highlighting this severe problem of open spaces. We have lived opposite Rosehill recreation park for many years, during which time we have seen several football pitches, several rugby pitches, a baseball pitch and two cricket pitches disappear. Now Sutton Council wants to build a new secondary school on an artificial sports pitch at one end of the park. The pitch was built at great expense but has since been left to fall into disrepair.

Mr & Mrs A. Taylor,
Sutton, Surrey

A new park opened in our area in June and we have set up a committee to help preserve it for the future. I think parks around the country should look into following this lead.

P. Carden, Winsford, Cheshire

IS YOUR PARK UNDER THREAT?

Email your story to: parks@mailonsunday.co.uk or write to: Save our Parks Campaign, Mail on Sunday, Northcliffe House, Derry Street, London W8 5JT

obs but no one cares

compared to the early 2000s. Parks are suffering from lack of maintenance, skilled staff are retiring and not being replaced, but councillors are simply not interested. However, when the social care bill increases due to a lack of facilities, they will wonder why.

Council budgets for both authorities have been hit disproportionately to many other councils, putting open spaces at risk of disappearing for good.

Urgent help is needed to prevent any further decline.

Name supplied via email

PRIZE LETTER

Letter of the Week wins a two-night stay for two at Jurys Inn. Choose from any of its 25 Exceptional Everyday City Hotels across the UK (two nights' B&B, terms and conditions apply). Located in the heart of the city, ideal for sightseeing, shopping and nightlife, Jurys Inn hotels offer spacious bedrooms as well as a stylish bar and restaurant. For the lowest rates, book online at www.jurysinn.com.

JURYS INN



Left-wing bias has no place in schools

Toby Young's article about how teachers are much more vocally Left-wing than they used to be gives many causes for concern.

For a start, spouting political opinion is a breeding ground for division and has no place in the classroom. It makes me wonder if, in schools, fair and open debate is tolerated.

By bringing one-sided politically fuelled agendas into school, we leave empathy at the door. Far Left or not, brainwashing in schools is far from OK.

Kelly Davies, London

The problem with teachers is that they are so self-righteous – a problem that runs through the public and charity sector. By

opting for a career in which they see themselves as 'helping others', they then seem to think they can do as they please, imposing their ideas on impressionable youngsters.

J. McLean, Manchester

I remember figures from 1980 showing that the largest support among teachers was for the Conservative Party, while by 1990 this had moved to the Lib Dems. It would seem that over nearly 40 years, there has been a sustained shift to the Left. Might this be a reaction to a perceived anti-teacher stance by Conservative governments?

David Smith,
Bletchley, Buckinghamshire

The teaching profession should be promoted more because children are in their care for about 13 years. Many spend more time with teachers than with their parents.

Dennis Fitzgerald,
Melbourne, Australia

I worry about our schools. A few years ago I worked for a local authority overseeing and maintaining our schools. The council employed experts to deal with all matters, from maintenance works to new projects, and help secure the money to do it. Due to cuts that has all but gone. These days the schools – and teachers – are on their own.

Peter Mitchell,
Weston-super-Mare

Show a little heart

V. de Bheal's letter last week did not need to mention that she is a millennial – that message came through loud and clear.

She said it was hard to be patriotic about a country where it was difficult for the young to buy a house.

But patriotism has nothing to do with that – it comes from the heart.

David White, Basingstoke

To afford a house usually takes years of saving and working hard. We live in the best country in the world, so instead of whingeing, people should believe in themselves and their country.

Sue Baldwin, Tewkesbury